Chapter 1

Introduction/Review of Literature

Introduction

Overview

Considerable research has been done regarding the strategies learners use while learning a second or foreign language. Learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8).

There are a number of popular methods of data collection used in observing these strategies. They involve: (1) diary and journal use, (2) surveys and questionnaires, (3) interviews, and think aloud procedures. Nunan (1992) describes elicitation techniques as those which include "studies which obtain their data by means of a stimulus, such as a picture, diagram, or standardized test, as well as those based on questionnaire, survey, and interview data" (p. 136). Oxford (1990) also lists videotaping of observation sessions and self-observation, "which asks learners to think about what they generally do when faced with familiar language tasks" (p. 195) as methods of gathering data.

Recent research has focused on each of the four individual language skills (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and also on the language as a whole. In addition, researchers have looked at gender and proficiency differences as they relate to strategies employed by the language learner. Oxford (1990) says that "many factors affect the choice of strategies: degree of awareness, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality/ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language" (p. 13).

Listening is the skill which seems to have been neglected most in the research. Because of this, I believe it is an important focus of language learning strategy research, and this is why this research is directed toward this area. In addition, a better understanding of the listening strategies used by the subjects of this study can help students in their situation become better learners in the future.

Some descriptions and definitions are provided in this introduction. They include at-riskness, strategies and strategy training, and the type of subjects to be used in this study. Also, the importance of language learning strategies is discussed in this section.

The terms at-risk and non at-risk learners are also referred to in the literature as successful and unsuccessful learners or good and poor/weak learners. The terms used in this study are at-risk and non at-risk, meaning at-risk of not successfully completing their course, or that the at-risk students have been identified (see Appendix C) as having difficulties and based on this identification, are expected to have lower overall outcome averages.

Focus of Study

The purpose of this study was to ask subjects to report on strategies used in a listening comprehension task. Not all strategies are included in the elicitation instrument, but rather eight strategies were identified and selected (see Methodology chapter) and the subjects were asked to answer whether they employed the strategy during the completion of a listening task.

The original task defined for the study was to compare two groups, at-risk students and non at-risk students, in their strategy use. A second and third comparison were drawn, gender and age.

The hypothesis for this study was that students who were identified as at-risk were less likely to employ the identified strategies on average than the non at-risk students. Based on information provided in the literature, outlined in the subheading section Studies in Strategies and Strategy Observation and Classifying and Conceptualizing Language Learning Strategies of this chapter, I also expected to find females as having higher overall outcomes of strategy use than male students, and older students having higher overall outcomes of strategy use than younger students. Therefore, it is important to describe at-riskness, strategies and strategy use, and elicitation methods in this chapter, in order to frame the study and justify the choice of methodology used in the study.

At-riskness

In this study I looked at at-risk learners and non at-risk learners, and asking: Which language learning strategies of the eight involved in the study do they use?

Pierce (1994) provides a popular definition for those students who have been labelled at-risk. In the definition Pierce claims that at-risk seems to be:

> a euphemism for students who exhibit a wide range of educational problems, including the failure to respond positively to the instruction offered in basic academic skills, the manifestation of unacceptable social behaviour in school, the inability to keep up with their classmates in academic subjects, and a limited

repertoire of experiences that provide background for formal education. (Pierce, 1994, p.37)

Berthoud (1996) defines the at-risk EFL learner as one who: (1) utilizes poor learning strategies within the classroom , (2) does not do homework regularly, (3) does not come to class regularly, (4) does not study or studies inefficiently for a test, (5) does not review new material on a regular basis, (6) possesses poor study habits, (7) feels efforts to learn English are useless, (8) has low motivation for learning English, and (9) cannot function on the levels of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

This (Berthoud's) is the definition of at-risk that was adopted for the purposes of this study. The way the list was determined is not examined or criticized here, but rather is accepted assuming the research leading to the definition yielded the results as reported in the definition. Regarding point one about poor learning strategies, I did not find evidence in the literature supporting a difference between good or poor learning strategies. The definitions are discussed more as the good or poor use of learning strategies.

Strategies and Strategy Training

Definitions of strategy and strategy training are provided in Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992). They define strategies as "procedures used in learning, thinking, etc. which serve as a way of reaching a goal. In language learning, learning strategies and communicative strategies are those conscious or unconscious processes which language learners make use of in learning and using a language" (p. 355). They define strategy training as "training in the use of learning strategies in order to improve a learner's

effectiveness" (p. 355). The training may involve conscious and unconscious strategies, though the training clearly must imply conscious use during the learning of strategy use, and the later unconscious employment of some of the strategies. It is important to note that the literature does not concur on exactly which strategies are conscious and which are unconscious, or whether unconscious strategies can be observed at all, though for the purposes of this study it is assumed that unconscious strategies can be observed through interviews or think aloud procedure, or by observation techniques.

As my study used the introspective interview procedure, it asked students to reflect on strategies used. During the exercise some of the strategies employed by the subjects were conscious and others unconscious. Even looking at a single strategy such as using cognates may be used consciously one time, and unconsciously the next. The interview technique therefore asked students to recall strategies used during the completion of the listening task, though not whether they were consciously or unconsciously using the strategy at the time, but rather, on reflection, if they recalled the use of the strategy.

Oxford (1990) states that the goals for strategy training are "to help make language learning more meaningful, to encourage a collaborative spirit between learner and teacher, to learn about options for language learning, and to learn and practice strategies that facilitate self-reliance" (p. 201).

Oxford (1990) says that language learning strategies can by taught by awareness training where "participants become aware of and familiar with the general idea of language learning strategies and the way such strategies can help them accomplish

various language tasks", one-time strategy training where the learner has a need "for particular, identifiable, and very targeted strategies that can be taught in just a few session(s)", and long term strategy training, where "students learn the significance of particular strategies, when and how to use them, and how to monitor and evaluate their performance" (pp. 202 - 203).

Oxford (1990) provides a definition of language learning strategies. She states that learning strategies are:

> "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence (p. 1)."

Kirby (1984) distinguishes between processes and strategies. He states that "a strategy is essentially a method for approaching a task, or more generally attaining a goal. Each strategy would call upon a variety of processes in the course of operation" (p. 5). The processes involved refer to a subset of the cognitive or mental functions, which are usually contained together in a general category (Kirby, 1984). Kirby explains that:

> "the term strategy has come to refer to the implementation of a set of procedures (tactics) for accomplishing something. Thus, a learning strategy is a sequence of procedures for accomplishing learning" (p. 5).

In this context, I assumed that students would be employing more than one strategy for the completion of one task. This is why students were given the task to complete fully before they were interviewed. The listening text was taken as a whole, rather than in parts.

The Importance of Language Learning Strategies

Wenden (1991) provides several excerpts from various studies which support the argument for studying and applying language learning strategies. She calls them reasons for promoting learner autonomy. She cites Wesche (1979) as saying "the statistical analyses and interview findings both provide evidence that a number of the learning behaviours and activities investigated were indeed related to the improvement of French listening and speaking skills by these adult students in beginning level intensive French training" (p. 12).

Wenden also cites Tyacke and Mendelsohn (1988) by saying that "perhaps this [observing strategies used rather than personality factors involved] is the most realistic approach to take until we know more about what is going on in the learner's head...We know that making them more flexible is not going to do them any harm. Perhaps good learners are those who are capable of making those shifts themselves anyway" (p. 12).

Wenden also cites Dansereau (1978) by saying that "by not stressing learning strategies, educators in essence discourage students from developing and exploring new strategies, and, in so doing, limit students' awareness of their cognitive capabilities" (p. 14). Wenden uses these studies in order to support the opinion of the necessity of

teaching language learning strategies in the foreign language classroom. She feels that strategy training can only help, not harm the student.

MacIntyre (1994) suggests another approach to the need for the study of strategy use. He says that:

> "In the past few years, the literature has shown substantial growth in the study of language learning strategies and their relation to language learning and communication. With such rapid advances, it is necessary to closely examine the approach taken to this increasingly complex topic. Some of that complexity seems to arise from treating strategies with too broad a scope. Several other learner and situational variables interact with strategies to influence second language proficiency" (p. 185).

Though MacIntyre (1994) refers in this last section to situational and learner variables, it is difficult to account for all variables in a short term study. The learner variable taken into account in this study is that of at-risk versus non at-risk learners. In terms of treating strategies with too broad a scope, an effort was made to limit this by asking students about specific strategies employed.

Oxford and Crookall (1989) (as cited in MacIntyre, 1994) describe learning strategies as "steps taken by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, or use of information" (p. 185). MacIntyre states that "in general terms, language learning strategies are the techniques and tricks that learners use to make the language easier to master" (p. 185). He says that the area of strategy study should take into account

learner and situational variables, and that strategy study should be looked at as a complex aspect of the field of linguistics.

Second Semester EFL Students at UDLAP

The students who were interviewed in this study are beginning intermediate second semester EFL students at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla. They were in a class which uses a communicative text and communicative philosophy of teaching. It is important to note that most of the students in DL 200, particularly the students who enter at this level, have had little or no experience with a communicative approach in the English language classroom. These students come from a background of traditional language learning in the public high schools and also in many private schools in Mexico. The communicative approach is something not commonly found in Mexican schools. For many students this can mean a big change in the type of classroom experience they have at the Universidad de las Americas.

Some of the subjects were identified as having problems with understanding spoken English. The students to be tested were divided into three groups according to previously determined criteria (see subheading Subjects in the Methodology chapter). I studied two of those three groups, as one of the groups is participating in another study, and I compared the use of strategies of the remaining two groups, at-risk and non at-risk.

Review of literature

The review of literature focuses on language learning strategies, and strategy observation, classifying and conceptualizing strategies, listening strategies, and interview procedure.

Language Learning Strategies

Perhaps the most comprehensive book on strategies has been written by Oxford (1990) who says that language learning strategies contribute to the main goal of communicative competence, allow learners to become more self-directed, expand the role of teachers, are problem-oriented, are specific actions taken by the learner, and involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive. The strategies also support learning both directly and indirectly, are not always observable, are often conscious, can be taught, and are flexible.

Oxford (1990) describes strategies in detail and their application to the classroom setting and the four language skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening). She provides a precise description of various language learning strategies and many practical examples of how to employ and identify them as well as how to train students to use them. Some learning strategies mentioned include: (1) compensation, (2) cognition, and (3) memory strategies as direct strategies for dealing with language, and as indirect strategies for general management of learning, Oxford mentions: (1) affective, (2) metacognitive strategies, and (3) social strategies.

These strategies, used in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a strategy use test for second language learners, are detailed by Oxford (1990). Though

some of the strategies listed below may be arguably not considered strategies rather than automatic mental processes a learner goes through when learning a language, they are Oxford's examples of strategies. Taken in context they may be considered strategies according to her definition. The strategies referred to in the SILL are actually types of strategies and are grouped as follows, the first three being direct strategies and the last three being indirect strategies:

1. memory - associating/elaborating, using imagery, placing new words into context, representing sounds in memory, and using keywords
2. cognitive - getting the idea quickly, reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, translating, and transferring
3. compensation - using linguistic and other cues, guessing intelligently
4. metacognitive - paying attention, organizing, self-evaluating, using progressive relaxation, delaying speech production to focus on learning
5. affective - rewarding yourself, making positive statements, taking risks wisely, and listening to your body
6. social - cooperating with peers, asking for clarification and verification, and cooperating with proficient users of the new language

(Oxford 1990)

Wenden (1991) says that cognitive strategies are "mental steps or operations that learners use to process both linguistic and sociolinguistic content" (p. 19). For metacognitive strategies Wenden states that :

> metacognitive knowledge about language learning...[is] that segment of your...stored world knowledge that has to do with people as cognitive creatures and with their diverse cognitive tasks, goals, actions, and experiences. In a broad sense, metacognitive knowledge includes all facts learners acquire about their own cognitive processes as they are applied and used to gain knowledge and acquire skills in varied situations (p. 34).

In their article, Ashman and Conway (1989) examine cognitive strategies, one of the strategy types used in the SILL. They say that these strategies include: rehearsal, mnemonics, and verbal self-instruction. Metacognition they say, is thinking about thinking about how a person learns. Oxford (1990) states that metacognitive strategies "help students to regulate their own cognition by assessing how they are learning and by planning for future language tasks (p. 16). In other words, cognitive strategies are often used without the person necessarily being aware of their use, whereas metacognitive strategies are used intentionally, the person having made a conscious decision to use them. (Ashman & Conway, 1989)

Memory strategies are ways of remembering and retrieving new information (Oxford 1990), and compensation strategies are for using the language despite knowledge gaps. Other strategies mentioned by Oxford (1990) are setting goals and objectives, considering the purpose of the task, and planning for a language task.

Interview Procedure

There are a number of types of interviews (Nunan, 1992) which provide options for the researcher. These include the structured and unstructured interview, and the

introspective and retrospective interview. In the structured interview (Appendix A), the interviewee is asked direct questions which may lead the interviewee to give an answer which can be categorized. In some cases, the interviewer uses a type of flow chart in order to alter the direction of questions asked according to the interviewee's answer.

In the unstructured interview (Nunan, 1992), the interviewer opens a dialogue with the interviewee and has the interviewee provide as much information about the topic as possible without asking direct questions, except for general critical thinking questions (Appendix A). The interviewee's answers are analyzed later to see if any of the answers can be categorized. In the introspective interview, the interviewee normally completes an exercise or activity and the interview is conducted immediately afterward. In the retrospective interview, the interviewee is given a task to perform and is then asked about the activity or task some time after it has been completed. The interviewee is then asked to recall what he or she did or thought of during its completion.

In discussing the structured interview, according to Nunan (1992), the elements of this type of interview involve briefing and explaining procedure to the students, explaining the purpose of the interviews and answering any questions they may have. Then follows the actual questioning, or interview procedure.

Problems listed for the interviewing type of elicitation (both introspective and retrospective) technique include quantifying of qualitative data, the possibility for misinterpretation of the data, and the possibility of failure of the interview for various reasons, (e.g. failed equipment, or failure to establish a rapport with the interviewee).

Nunan (1992) recommends piloting an interview study before the actual study is carried out.

No matter whether the method of data collection is through interview, survey, questionnaire, proficiency exam (where levels of English proficiency of the learner can be assessed), or other method, it is possible to use an introspective process. Nunan (1992) cites introspection as being "the process of observing and reflecting on one's thoughts, feelings, motives, reasoning processes, and mental states with a view to determining the ways in which these processes and states determine our behaviour" (p. 115).

The following are some of the ways of using introspection. Introspective methods include think-aloud techniques or "those in which subjects complete a task or solve a problem and verbalise their thought processes as they do so" (Nunan, 1992, p. 117). They also include anagrams or nonsense words, where subjects "are required to think aloud as they unscramble [them] to make a meaningful word (p. 118), and diary studies, where "diaries, logs, and journals...have been used in investigations of second language acquisition, teacher-learner interactions, teacher education, and other aspects of language learning and use...[and] diaries can be kept by learners, by teachers, or by participant observers" (pp. 119 - 120).

Retrospection was an option for my study which was discarded due to the criticism outlined in this paragraph, in contrast to introspection. Retrospection is defined as the data "collected some time after the event under investigation has taken place," (Nunan, 1992, p. 124). It has been criticized by a number of researchers. The main

characteristic under criticism is that "the gap between the event and the reporting will lead to unreliable data" (p. 124). Though the introspective interview is also performed after the task has been completed in some cases, the difference between this and the retrospective type of collection is the lag time. In this case of my study there was a difference of only minutes between the completion of the task and the interview.

Nunan (1992) provides a critique of this type of retrospective methodology, asking "would the subjects have responded in these ways if the situations were genuine rather than elicited" (p. 156)? The same could be said for introspective in a non-natural setting. Nunan also says that the type of data collected in the use of this methodology is often not tested for statistical significance.

Cohen (in Cumming, 1994), also supports the use of the introspective interview technique, using self-report, self-observation, and self-revelation. As a value of this technique, he states that these reports can "help teachers, researchers, or students themselves better understand the nature of learners' views of their learning tasks", and that this research "has helped educators to conceptualize more precisely what students think when they perform learning tasks or encounter problems in an L2, distinguishing strategies that may be more or less effective for learning or communication" (p. 679).

Wenden (1991) supports the use of introspective data, or think-aloud techniques. She says that students or subjects can report orally to a listener what they think they are doing while performing a task. This type of introspective data is used to get information on students' learning processes, and there is no "separation in time between the report and task" (p. 81). In retrospective self-reports, Wenden says that the students or

subjects can "also be asked to think back or retrospect on their language learning and to write about it" (p. 83), possibly focusing on a specific skill a student used, or their feelings towards a specific skill or technique, or to provide insight or to raise awareness of the strategies used by the subjects.

The terms interview and think-aloud procedure are used interchangeably in the literature. Though they may differ in terms of the ratio of interviewer to interviewee centered time in the session, they are used in the same way. Think-aloud procedure would be most effectively used in testing reading comprehension as the learner can be speaking as he or she completes a task, but it is difficult if not impossible for the student to be listening to the cassette and providing oral responses at the same time. The think-aloud part is involved in the interview session when the learner is asked to report on strategies used.

Studies in Strategies and Strategy Observation

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) (as cited in Cook, 1993) conducted a research project on learning strategies. They conducted interviews with 22 teachers and 70 high-school ESL students, asking them to identify different strategies that the subjects believed were used by most learners. They placed their findings into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are "strategies about learning rather than learning strategies themselves", such as deciding in advance to concentrate on general aspects of a learning task or trying to arrange the appropriate conditions for learning, sitting in front of the class, or giving oneself rewards for success (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p.

114). Cognitive strategies involve directly operating on incoming information, "manipulating it in ways that enhance learning", such as repetition, directed physical response, or translation (p. 114). Social mediation strategies also known as social/affective strategies "represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect", such as co-operation, working with other students, summarizing new information, rehearsal, or going over the language needed for a task (p. 115). They found that students tended to use cognitive strategies far more than they did the other two.

Also looking at strategies, Sanaoui (1995) reported on her study involving English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language (FSL) students. Her objectives were similar to those in my study, to identify which strategies the students are using to learn the L2. Sanaoui also used introspective interviews. She was seeking to define "how do adult second language (L2) learners approach the task of vocabulary learning and what mnemonic procedures do they use to help themselves retain the lexical items that they are learning in their L2?" (p. 15). Sanaoui was primarily testing for behaviours and procedures which the subjects were using as they learned vocabulary. Three sets of subjects were investigated. The first set examined was the entire group and the task was identifying what strategies they were using to learn vocabulary in the second language. The next two sets were two groups used in the studies. One involved how ESL learners use strategies, and the other, how FSL students use strategies.

Questions asked of the participants by Sanaoui (1995) were as follows: "What steps did you follow when you did this [referring to some notes that students had made

to help themselves remember words]?; What was your purpose for doing this?; Did someone ask you to do this?...Is this something you have done before?; When have you done this before?; How often have you done this?; Did you do this in the same way you did before?" (p. 20).

The students' metacognitive strategies were examined, (mnemonic procedures such as spaced repetition and contextual associations), then they were given strategy training. The results led to a categorization of the FSL subjects into two groups, Group A and Group B, according to similarities and differences in the ways they approached vocabulary study. Group A was found to be supplementing their in-class opportunities for "vocabulary learning by self-created learning activities" (p. 20). These included listening to daily news on the radio and playing French language computer games. Group B consisted of the people who studied minimally, and relied on in-class and textbook materials for their vocabulary learning.

The ESL group could not be divided so neatly into two categories, but rather each subject reported the use of their particular kind of strategies. Some of these included studying words learned in the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) class, reading books out loud, and writing down all new words in a notebook to be studied later (Sanaoui, 1995). "The participants reported using the following mnemonic procedures for retaining vocabulary items they were learning: repetition, imagery, association of the word to be learned with another word in the first or second language" and others (p. 19).

Similar to Sanaoui, in a study by Lawson and Hogben (1996), a think-aloud or interview procedure was used. This method was used for observing the behavior of 15 university students in Australia, who had experience in Italian, as they attempted to learn the meanings of new foreign language (Italian) words. These researchers designed a test to see what language learning strategies the students were employing, how they were using them, and how often (Lawson and Hogben, 1996).

Lawson and Hogben had observed a lack of attention to vocabulary in the recent past by applied linguists. Therefore they set about investigating vocabulary learning strategies to arrive at conclusions about which were most effective in the learning. This was done to be able to help students learn second language vocabulary in the future. They examined the different aspects of deliberate vocabulary acquisition, the use of context, the use of the dictionary, the use of key words, and other strategies. Lawson and Hogben gave the students a set of twelve new words (nouns), previously unknown to them. The students were asked to learn the words in the course of an interview (Lawson and Hogben, 1996).

They used the introspective think-aloud or interview procedure as did Sanaoui to monitor how the students were using the techniques. The interviews were taped, and the transcripts later analysed. The strategies were identified and compared. The students were tested on the words they had just learned, and the results of the tests were compared. Lawson and Hogben (1996) concluded that both the top scoring and bottom scoring group "made considerable use of simple rehearsal (word repetition) and both groups attended to the related words that were supplied on the reverse side of the cards"

(pp. 126 - 127) they were provided with. Overall, the bottom scoring group was "most obviously characterised by its limited [in range] strategy use" (p. 126).

There are several ways of observing conscious strategy use, as mentioned previously, such as self-reports, think aloud procedures and journals. There are two possible ways of observing unconscious strategy use: (1) introspective or retrospective interviews, where students are asked to reflect on recalled strategies used, and (2) observation, where a researcher may observe students using a compensation strategy for example, though the student is not conscious of having used it.

Several categories of strategies were identified which Lawson and Hogben (1996) expected to see in use by their subjects. They were: (1) repetition such as the reading of related words, simple rehearsal (student repeats the word, with or without repeating its meaning, at least once), writing of word and meaning, cumulative rehearsal (the student not only repeats the word and/or meaning, but also returns to previous words and rehearses these in a sequence), and testing (the student self-tests, like with note cards), (2) word feature analysis involving spelling, word classification, and suffix, (3) simple elaboration using sentence translation, simple use of context, appearance similarity, and sound and (4) complex elaboration such as complex use of context, paraphrase, and mnemonic.

They scored each of the subjects as they used any or all of the strategies. They categorized the use according to number of occurrences of the use of each strategy. Subjects normally used more than one strategy for the learning of each particular vocabulary word. For example, when asked to learn the given word, a student may have

employed the strategies of spelling, simple rehearsal, and sound (Lawson and Hogben, 1996).

The most frequently occurring strategies on the matrix were simple rehearsal and the reading of related words (the student makes use of the information on words related to the new word by reading them out at least once as an aid to learning the target word). These were found to be highly used by both the high-scoring group and by the low-scoring group. The next most popular strategy employed was used more often by the high-scoring group, that of writing of word and meaning (Lawson and Hogben, 1996).

Pfaff (1987) looks at strategies used by children learning French as a Second Language. Specifically she looks at the ways in which students associate sentences and parts of sentences in the L2. She used a number of techniques in order to determine which strategies the young students were using. The techniques included: acting out, using a questioning technique (a form of interviewing), and also checking their written work. Through this work she established that, for example, "comprehension of sentences in which the referent of the pronoun is the patient of both clauses...is more difficult for children under 6 years of age than comprehension of sentences in which the referent of the pronoun is the patient in one clause and the agent in another" (p. 38). Patient and agent here are used to refer to the doer and receiver of the action in a sentence.

In analyzing the usefulness of strategy observation, Pfaff (1987) concludes that "strategies then are merely ways of answering the psycholinguist's questions or interpreting sentences in the real world when the structure of these sentences is not yet

understood and the child does not know what else to do. They do not explain how the child acquires those structures" (p. 40). This then implies a distinction between strategies used in learning and those used in acquisition, if any. A distinction between learning and acquisition as provided by Oxford (1990) is that "learning is conscious knowledge of language rules, does not typically lead to conversational fluency, and is derived from formal instruction. Acquisition, on the other hand, occurs unconsciously and spontaneously, does lead to conversation fluency, and arises from naturalistic use" (p. 4).

It may also be the case that it is difficult to have younger students reporting on strategy use because of conceptualization difficulties, such as in the interview setting, where this is less of a barrier in testing adolescent or adult learners. Also important, is the fact that though strategies are often employed in learning and acquisition, they may not be employed effectively, and therefore are not necessarily a reflection of successful learning or acquisition taking place.

Green and Oxford (1995) examined learning strategies, and how they related to L2 proficiency and gender. They were specifically looking at which strategies were employed by men in comparison to women, at a university in Puerto Rico, across three levels of the ESL program. They also tested for relationship between proficiency levels, and strategy use. Green and Oxford used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, or SILL which was mentioned previously. "The SILL consists of statements following a general format "I do such-and-such"; students respond on a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from 1...never or almost never true of me...to 5...always or almost always true of me..." (Green and Oxford, 1995, p. 264).

The results of the SILL are then divided into six strategy classifying groups. The first three are direct strategies and the last three are indirect. These strategies were defined previously under the subheading Language Learning Strategies, and are further defined here. These strategies are mentioned by Oxford (1990), and are classified in this way in the description that follows:

1. *memory*-related strategies, such as grouping, imagery, rhyming, moving physically, and reviewing in a structured way
2. general *cognitive* strategies, such as reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, and practising (including but not limited to active use of the language)
3. *compensatory* strategies (to make up for limited knowledge), such as guessing meanings from context and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning (Green and Oxford, 1994, pp. 264 - 265).
4. *metacognitive* strategies for evaluating one's progress, planning for language tasks, consciously searching for practice opportunities, paying attention, and monitoring errors
5. *affective* strategies for anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward
6. *social* strategies such as asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, and becoming culturally aware

"The six...categories were created as (not mutually exclusive) areas of strategy use to be investigated. These areas partially reflected earlier factor analyses of a longer version of the SILL designed for native English speakers learning foreign languages" (Green and Oxford, 1994, pp. 264 - 265).

The findings of the Green and Oxford study (1994) do in fact yield significant results in several of the strategy categories, between gender and strategy use, and also proficiency level and strategy use. For the independent variable of proficiency, they found that intermediates tended to use more cognitive and compensation strategies, and prebasics used more affective and social strategies. For the independent variable for gender, women used all the strategies more than the male students. (Green and Oxford, 1994).

They (Green and Oxford, 1994) then postulate on the various possible explanations for these findings. One aspect of the relationship between proficiency level and strategy use which recurs elsewhere in the literature, is that it is difficult to tell which precedes which, though there is definitely a relationship which indicates the higher the proficiency level of the student, the more strategies employed. (Green and Oxford, 1994)

Classifying and Conceptualizing Language Learning Strategies

Oxford and Cohen (1992) looked at language learning strategies, and the problems of classifying and conceptualizing language learning strategies. Specifically they list seven problems of the conceptual and classificatory problems to be solved as they relate to language learning strategies. These are as follows:

1. Distinctions between "strategy" and "tactics" are unclear or non-existent.
2. Researchers often disagree about whether learning strategies are conscious or unconscious.
3. Many different criteria are used for classifying language learning strategies - the "moving target" syndrome.
4. Researchers argue about *learner* strategies vs. *learning* strategies - or what contributes to learning a language.
5. The concept of "strategic competence" in the well-known communicative competence framework is too narrow.
6. Many studies fail to show the conceptual link between language learning strategies on the one hand and learning styles, other personality-related variables, and demographic factors on the other.
7. So far, it is impossible to discern appropriate language learning strategy classifications for natural settings or technology-assisted instruction. (Oxford and Cohen, 1992, p. 3)

I cite these issues as these uncertainties or ambiguities might lead to confusion both to those studying learning strategies, and also for those trying to interpret the work of one who has studied them. Oxford and Cohen (1992) present each as a problem and also provide a tentative solution for each. They attempt to clarify some of the grey lines involved in language learning strategy research. For the purposes of my research, I adopted certain positions on the problems presented above, in anticipation of these being problems I was to encounter.

Strategies and tactics are considered the same. According to Oxford and Cohen (1992), tactics are said to be the procedures used in employing a particular strategy. I focus on listening strategies. Strategic competence is not tested in this study. Demographic factors were used as a comparison, however personality-related variables are not taken into account, due to limitations of time, and gaps in the data collected which did not lead to a complete sample of other variables.

Oxford and Cohen (1992) state that popular research indicates that if a strategy is not conscious, then it is not to be considered a strategy. On this I disagree. I believe, and have found elsewhere in the literature for example where Pfaff (1987) compares adult learners to child learners, that it is possible for a strategy which is being employed, to be unconscious, in that the student may not be aware of using it, or may not previously have had the necessary concepts of strategies to articulate what strategy is being used. This again indicates that it has not been widely accepted that unconscious strategies can in fact be observed, or whether the strategies which can be are always conscious.

In the matter of the "moving target syndrome" (Oxford and Cohen, 1992), the issue is broad enough to generalize as a problem across the body of research encompassing language learning strategy studies. The solution presented in the article, which I used as a focus, is that "investigators should come up with one or more acceptable sets of criteria for categorizing language learning strategies" (p. 18). This means then, that it was very important to have a strict set of criteria for classifying strategies, allowing for as little ambiguity as possible, as different authors categorize

strategies differently. I decided specifically on several strategies I looked for which could be identified into categories.

According to Oxford and Cohen (1992), the focus of strategy study should be on communicative and strategic competence, which is "the learner's ability to use a small group of speaking-related strategies to compensate for inadequate grammar or vocabulary" (p. 21), rather than on the actual strategies which are employed.

They (Oxford & Cohen, 1992) considered demographic and personality-related variables, "such as anxiety and self-concept" (p.23), as well as learning styles, which they divide into deep (categorizing, comparing, hierarchically organizing), elaborative (generating personal examples, using personal images), and shallow (memorizing, repetitive rehearsing, mnemonics). Here Oxford and Cohen (1992) provide another option for categorizing strategies, though this was not the type of categorization I used. I concentrated my study on the result of two of these factors (namely age and gender, the only data reported that was complete) and the strategies which were being used, rather than the influencing factors mentioned in this paragraph.

The seven problems have been summarized, those of conceptual and classificatory problems common in today's research into language learning strategies, and I have extracted and selected those points which needed to be considered for this study in order to avoid problems in classification and categorization.

I needed to distinguish between "strategies" and "tactics", as they are both terms often used when referring to strategies. I needed to have the strategy categories clearly defined (Appendix B), or agree to allow crossovers into two or more categories, in order

to compensate for the "moving target syndrome". Also I needed to decide to categorize strategies which are both seemingly conscious, and seemingly unconscious as the same. Regarding demographic factors, I took the background questionnaire results into account in terms of comparing gender and age category results with the overall strategy use results. The gender and age results provided by the subjects were the only complete sets of data which resulted from the questionnaires.

Peters (in Fletcher and Garman 1986) cautions against "generalizing to all children from data collected from only a few" (p. 310). She says this in consideration of strategy use and individual differences. Peters speaks of unconscious strategy use by saying that some students are using the bottom-up approach to strategies, while others are using the top-down approach. In the case of children it must be presumed that they are not consciously employing strategies from the beginning as they are unable yet to conceptualize strategy use. Peters says that:

> "[i]n brief, when using the bottom-up approach the learner seems to try to work with chunks that are as small as possible - often only single (usually stressed) syllables of the adult language...whereas users of the top-down approach seem to feel comfortable working with much longer chunks of language (often referred to as *formulae*) which correspond to whole words or phrases of the adult language" (pp. 310 - 311).

The author does not imply that strategies and individual learner differences are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, she says that learner differences should be considered when looking at strategy use, rather than generalizing across learners.

In terms of conceptualizing strategies, McLaughlin (1984) proposes two perspectives: (1) "first and second language acquisition involve essentially the same general (perhaps universal) cognitive strategies", and (2) "errors of various types are best described in strategy terms" (pp. 225 and 228). In the first proposal, McLaughlin says that:

> "We have evidence that children learn the more simple rules of phonology before the more complex, that they give the meaning of individual words a broad extension, only gradually assigning words roughly the same set of semantic features they have for adults. These findings hold for both first- and second-language learning" (pp. 225 - 226)

Though these are natural courses of language acquisition, they may at the same time be considered the employing of unconscious strategy use, and in some cases conscious.

With regard to the second proposal, McLaughlin (1984) says that:

> "Under certain conditions of acquisition, very little interference between languages has been observed. Much of what appears to be interference between languages is actually a result of strategies the learner uses to discover regularities in the target language. In fact, I propose that all errors represent learning strategies" (p. 228).

McLaughlin (1984), in putting forth these two proposals, seeks to define not strategies, so much as the use of strategies in the practical context. This has relevance for the study in that it can be presumed that students are using strategies to make use of

their errors in order to discover rules and exceptions. Resolving errors is a motivating factor for students studying EFL and may provoke them to use strategies in a more effective way or identify the strategies they use more readily, through strategy training.

Given that strategies, according to McLaughlin (1984), already exist in the acquisition of the L1 and are present in all aspects of interference between L1 and L2, he suggests that it is useful to understand strategies as they are used in L1, and that conversely, we can use strategy knowledge from L2 to generalize to L1 acquisition through strategy use.

Listening Strategies

Using the six types of strategies mentioned in the previous section, and the three main categories of strategies, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, Oxford (1990) examines how these can be applied to each of the four language skills. Specifically related to listening, she claims that grouping, which "involves classifying or reclassifying what is heard or read into meaningful groups" (p. 58), "associating/ elaborating...placing new words into a context...using imagery...semantic mapping (arranging concepts and relationships on paper to create a semantic map)....using keywords...representing sounds in memory" (pp. 60 - 63) (conscious use of verbal mnemonic devices) and other strategy uses are employed. Students use these and other techniques then to help themselves categorize input into manageable pieces where they can retrieve the information for later use. This helps the student encode listening input to aid in language learning.

Vogely (1995) compared "students' perceived strategy use and their performance on both authentic and traditional listening comprehension tasks" (p. 41). She also compares the skills required for reading comprehension and listening comprehension, saying that "although these processes may be distinct, they have enough commonalities to provide a valid starting point for research in FL [foreign language] listening comprehension" (pp. 46). Results showed a significant relationship between a student's perceived strategy use and comprehension, in other words, "those [students] who reported that they used effective strategies comprehended more than those who did not report using such strategies" (p. 46).

In one study Vogely (1995) found that students "differed more in the way in which they applied the strategies than in the type of strategies they used" (p. 47). She also found that motivation for learning a language had a lot to do with success in using the strategies. Vogely categorized these strategies into metacognitive or "the use of cognitive and metacognitive resources in the face of actual or anticipated cognitive failure" (p. 42), and also cognitive, which include clarification, verification, guessing and inductive inferencing.

Berman (in Fletcher and Garman, 1986) looked at learning strategies used by children also, both in reading and listening. She says that students are using context-dependent strategies. In her study she found that students were even abandoning morphosyntactic cues in a spoken or written sentence in favour of context, in order to determine meaning. This is referred to by her as the plausible event strategy. Therefore, what the context means to them in terms of the real world, and what the

sentence may be saying in other grammatical terms, are not distinguished between. The student favours the meaning which they think the sentence is trying to say.

The other strategy Berman (in Fletcher and Garman, 1986) talks about is rote learning. She says that students often memorize a number of words, then later phrases, and actively try to fit them into their place in grammatical and communicative context. They use these bases for rule acquisition.

Throughout the literature, there are comparisons between L1 versus L2 learning and acquisition, as well as L2 learning and acquisition in adults versus children. Also throughout there is the contrast between conscious and unconscious strategy use. Several examples have been provided to show that strategy use is employed in L1 learning in children (looking up words in the dictionary, or asking someone how to spell, define or pronounce a word and others), and also in L2 learning in children. It appears that strategies are used in all of the four conditions mentioned above, and that in most cases, strategies are a normal part of the language acquisition process. Some strategies are more difficult to observe than others, such as unconscious and child language learning strategies, however, it has been demonstrated that the strategies are being employed at all levels and stages of L1 and L2 learning in children and in adults.

McLaughlin (1984) in looking at individual differences and cognitive language learning strategies, suggests a number of strategies a learner can use to help in language learning and acquisition. These are the following:

1. Assume that what people are saying is directly relevant to the situation at hand, or to what they or you are experiencing. Metastrategy: Guess!

2. Get some expressions you understand, and start talking.
3. Look for recurring parts in the formulas you know.
4. Make the most of what you've got [overextensions, use what you know as much as possible in order to make use of something/anything].
5. Work on the big things first; save the details for later. (p. 162)

For social strategies, McLaughlin suggests the following:

1. Join a group and act as if you understand what's going on, even if you don't.
2. Give the impression - with a few well-chosen words - that you can speak the language.
3. Count on your friends for help. (p. 162)

These strategies are given by McLaughlin, after analyzing the limitations students put on their own learning, in recognition of their individual differences. They are mentioned in the context of learners having a role in what native speakers believe they can understand and say, and the impression they give. Wong Fillmore (1976) (as cited in McLaughlin, 1984) argues that:

> "it is the second-language learner's responsibility to give evidence of being able to speak well. It is not enough for learners to show that they can understand the language; they have to give the impression that they can use it, so that native speakers will keep trying to communicate with them" (p. 163).

For listening this implies that students/learners need to take an active role in their listening comprehension efforts, projecting to the native speaker or interlocutor that they

are looking to engage in conversation. It also implies that the learner would have the native speaker believe that it is his or her responsibility to let them know when he or she needs clarification or explanation of a part of the conversation not understood by the learner.

In terms of sociopsychological factors, McLaughlin (1984) says that students may be of two orientations, integrative and segregative. He assumed that "learners with a strong integrative orientation are more motivated to learn the language and in fact use different strategies of "simplification," elaborating the language more and testing out hypotheses about the language to a greater extent than do learners who have a segregative orientation" (p. 175). Therefore, it is the integrative learner who is more likely to make use of the strategies suggested in the previous paragraph, and the segregative learner that would need to make a stronger effort to employ the cognitive and social strategies.